

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Reason for Choosing The Topic

Girl, Woman, Other is a novel written by Bernardine Evaristo. Published in 2019, this novel received the 2019 Booker Prize award alongside Margaret Atwood's *The Testament*. The novel follows the lives of 12 different characters living in the United Kingdom throughout several decades from a young girl to an elderly woman and a non-binary character who cannot be categorized as a woman or man. Each character has her own chapter which contains a story about her struggle, love, family, and passion.

Every character is a descendant of black immigrants who came to the United Kingdom a long time before. The author tells the story about how the immigrants managed to survive in an environment where women and people of color are being oppressed. Some of the characters receive unfair treatments, whether gender and/or racial oppression. The gender oppression mostly happens in their relationship and some they received from society.

Most of the problems happened when their partners or friends abuse them physically, mentally, or both. One of the main characters, Dominique has been isolated by her partner to assert dominance in their relationship, or the other character, Carole, is abused sexually when she is in her adolescence by her senior at school. These

treatments have affected their personality in the development of their characters in the story, depending on how they responded to the oppression.

These women responded to the negative treatments in various ways, some are capable to handle those treatments and very determined to prove that they are more than capable to survive and success in this kind of environment. While some of them choose to run away from the source of the problems themselves, either men or their partners. Unfortunately, not all of them are happy with their decisions to resist or submit. Some of the female characters believe that they have chosen a wrong path regarding their decisions and wish they could react better to what has happened in their lives.

From what can be seen from the novel, the writer chooses to analyze it by using a gender theory, specifically related to gender oppression and how the victims respond toward the oppression. This novel is published in recent year and still no studies have been conducted to analyze it. Moreover, the writer is also interested to do a research on this novel due to gender oppression, especially women's oppression, which usually happened in Middle East countries where patriarchal culture was prominent there. It is quite fascinating to see gender oppression happened in the United Kingdom which is what this novel portrayed.

The study of gender oppression can be one of the ways of achieving equality for both men and women. For a long time, women have been categorized as being less than or weaker than their gender counterpart. There has been a lot of situations in which men have significant advantages compared to women. Also considering the reality of

the society where women and girls are at risk when they go out compared to men because women and girls are more susceptible to harassment, rape, and abuse.

1.2. The Objective and Scope of the Study

The writer analyzes the *Girl, Woman, Other* which tells a story about struggles of women's lives which happened in London, United Kingdom from 1930s to 2010s. There are 12 main characters, but not all of them receive negative treatment regarding gender oppression. Only eight main characters, their relatives and acquaintances have to deal with the oppression. They became victims of oppression done by male characters in the novel.

Although the writer uses gender theory in this research and the novel can be analyzed through several of aspects such as; post-colonialism, racial discrimination, psychoanalysis, etc. This research only focuses on gender oppression and analyzes every occurrence that happens in the novel based on related theory. The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To describe gender oppressions in *Girl, Woman, Other*.
2. To describe responses towards gender oppression in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

1.3. Formulation of The Problem

The writer specifies the important data to analyze in this novel. In detail, the writer would like to focus the attention on the following aspects and makes them into two research questions as follows:

1. How are gender oppressions portrayed in *Girl, Woman, Other*?
2. How do the victims respond to gender oppression in *Girl, Woman, Other*?

1.4. Review of Related Literature

This section discusses the result of library research done by the writer related to any previous study and the theories used to analyze gender oppression and the victims' responses towards it as seen in *Girl, Woman, Other*.

1.4.1. Previous Study

The *Girl, Woman, Other* novel has received many critics and reviews from several reviewers. Dwight Garner from the New York Times said that this novel is a big, busy novel with a large root system about new ways of living. The characters in this novel start to arrive and they keep arriving. The readers are introduced to these character's friends and sometimes their family, too. This polyphonic novel contains a handful of interconnected stories that presented a landscape of abiding multicultural sensitivity. The author's dedication sets the tone that will prompt many readers to rush inside. The author also has a gift for appreciating the lives of the characters with sympathy and grace while gently skewering some of their desires. When people start a new way of living, there must be room for error.

The other reviewer, Micha Frazer-Carroll from The Guardian states that *Girl, Woman, Other* is a book about struggles, but also about love, joy, and imagination. The novel culminates with the protagonist – a black woman from several generations, believes, classes, faiths, and legacies- thrown together at a party for a soap-opera style

grand finale. Living in a patriarchal society presents challenges that unite many of us. Few questions proposed in the novel feel importunate yet everlasting: how can a woman combine a relationship with a man into her feminist way of life? Should they show anger to those who fail to understand them, even if from a position of ignorance? The author of *Girl, Woman, Other* leads the readers to the questions and makes it an impossible task to answer them.

This research mainly discussed gender oppression and response towards it as seen in *Girl, Woman, Other*. In order to keep the authenticity of this study and avoid plagiarism, the writer has done library research to find any other studies related to this novel. Based on the library research, any study about *Girl, Woman, Other* novel by Bernardine Evaristo has not been conducted yet.

1.4.2. Theoretical Framework

In order to achieve a good analysis, the writer needs theories to fully understand and analyze the literary work. Based on the topic of this research which focuses on the analysis of gender oppression, the writer chooses gender theory to analyze *Girl, Woman, Other*. The English-language distinction between the words sex and gender was first developed in the 1950s and 1960s by British and American psychiatrists and other medical personnel working with intersex and transsexual patients.

Since then, the term gender has been increasingly used to distinguish between sex as biological and gender as socially and culturally constructed. From this perspective, sex is fixed and based on nature; gender is fluid and based on culture. This distinction constitutes progress compared with 'biology is destiny'. However, it ignores

the existence of persons who do not fit neatly into the biological or social categories of women and men, such as intersex, transgender, transsexual people, and hijras (South Asian transgender population). Furthermore, for many people, the sex categories of female and male are neither fixed nor universal, but vary over time and across cultures. Accordingly, sex, like gender, is seen as a social and cultural construct (Esplen and Jolly, 2006).

According to INCITE (2005), gender oppression is the act of abuse and violence, patterns of control and power, and systems of abuse and violence committed by group or individual against women and girls because of their gender. This oppression is manifested particularly in a form of individuals, workplaces, or organizations systematically elevating men, men’s work, and men’s culture at the expense of women, women’s work, women’s culture; sexual harassment, sexual assault; and intimate partner or domestic violence (physical, emotional, sexual, economic).

INCITE (2005) breaks down the definition of gender oppression which can be seen in the table below;

Gender Oppression

Who Is Doing It	Doing What	Against Whom
1. Individual (Mostly men but can be women, transgender)	1. Individual acts of abuse and violence against women and girls	1. Women and girls (especially if more vulnerable or have less power because

<p>2. Organizations (workplaces, organizations, coalitions, constituencies, movements)</p> <p>3. Systems (imperialism, capitalism, militarism, police, prison-industrial complex, non- profit industrial complex, white male Christian heterosexual patriarchy)</p>	<p>2. Patterns of power and control elevating men/boys at the expense of women/girls</p> <p>3. Systems of abuse and violence targeting women/ girls</p>	<p>poor, person of color, indigenous, immigrant, queer, less education, disabled, English as second language or no English, young, dependent on the person/organization who is doing it)</p>
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Furthermore, INCITE (2005) also divided types of gender oppression into three terms, as can be seen from the table below;

TERM	DEFINITION	INCLUDE
Sexual Harassment	Unwanted sexual/affectionate attention or creation of an	Sexual looks/gestures Sexual comments Sexual jokes

	unwanted sexualized environment	Unwanted request for dates, sexual relations Subjecting to pornography or environment demeaning to women/girls/queer people Threats to demote, fire, harm (emotionally or physically) if sexual or dating requests are not met or if victim/survivor tells other people
Sexual Abuse/Assault	Coerced or otherwise unwanted sexual contact (if with a child, this can be any sexual exposure, behavior or contact)	Sexual touching Fondling, molesting Exposure to sexual parts/genitals of the offending person Oral, vaginal, anal touching or penetration by the offending person's body or object Threats to harm (emotionally or physically), demote, fire if sexual contact is not met or if victim/survivor tells other people

Intimate Partner Abuse-or-Domestic Violence	Acts of abuse or harm or pattern of power and control exercised by one person over another within an intimate relationship (dating, living together, married, former relationship, heterosexual or same-gender)	Physical abuse including threats and threats to harm others or self Verbal abuse Emotional abuse Isolation Sexual abuse/assault Economic/financial abuse Threats or use of other systems of oppression to gain power/control such as INS, queer outing, etc.
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Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with culprits using force, making threats, or taking advantage of the victim's inability to give consent. Most victims and perpetrators know each other. Immediate reactions to sexual abuse include shock, fear, or disbelief (Kazdin, 2000).

In gender oppression cases, many victims respond in many different ways that can be divided into two major categories which are resistance and submission. Resistance denotes a response to power from 'below'; a subordinate practice that can challenge, negotiate, and undermine power. This power can be resisted by negotiating or challenging norms and hierarchies, or by refusing to participate in self-disciplinary practices which are often very gendered (Johansson & Lilja, 2013).

Thus, resistance in gender oppression can be defined as every action or practice which is done by the victims to challenge or overthrow the "power", in this case, is the

person or group doing the oppression, in order to free themselves from the oppression. On the other hand, some victims chose to not do anything against this oppression, they just surrender and admit defeat to the norms that as a woman they cannot do anything and just move on with their lives. This act of admitting defeat also known as submission.

1.5. Method of the Research

This research focuses on gender oppression in the novel *Girl, Woman, Other* from a gender study point of view. The study concentrates on gender oppression and responses towards it which are portrayed in the novel. Gender oppression is closely related to how women are treated by men and women or society and how they respond to the treatments. In order to do the research and find the answers to the research problems, the writer applied a close reading method based on gender oppression theory.

Gender oppression is the act of abuse and violence, patterns of control and power, and systems of abuse and violence committed by group or individual against women and girls because of their gender. This oppression is manifested particularly in a form of individuals, workplaces, or organizations systematically elevating men, men's work, and men's culture at the expense of women, women's work, women's culture; sexual harassment, sexual assault; and intimate partner or domestic violence (physical, emotional, sexual, economic). Aiming to obtain the meaning of the text with an intention to answer the research problem on gender oppression, the writer uses interpretation techniques.

According to Jacobus (1996) interpretation is exploring the meaning of the text by drawing our own understanding, background, and observations while responding to literary work. This particular response can be given by the readers when they are reading the text. Interpreting literature can give a huge amount of values which is important to the writer and the work itself. The interpretation technique begins with close reading method.

Close reading method is thoughtful, critical analysis of a text that focuses on significant details or patterns in order to develop a deep, precise understanding of the text's form, craft, meanings, etc. It is a key requirement of the Common Core State Standards and directs the reader's attention to the text itself (Burke, 2016). In close reading, readers must take a note when they noticing some detail, such as imagery, peculiar use of language, repeated patterns, and the main ideas introduced by the writer which are related to the theory used by them.

Thus, in analyzing this novel, the writer read it carefully and repeatedly while taking notes on gender oppression and responses. After recognizing the texts which can be related to the theory of gender oppression, the writer carefully questioning the data by doing silent observation technique until all of the texts related to the theory are deeply and precisely understood. The data then analyzed by using gender oppression and response theory mentioned previously. These sequences are repeated carefully and critically to solve the research problems perfectly.

The details about the research problems are inspected based on gender theory. Gender oppression is related to the treatments received by women from their gender

counterparts or their sexual partners. The negative treatments commonly received by women are sexual harassment and abusive relationships. The common response to gender oppression is resistance. It signifies every attempt done by the victims to break the oppressor's power and domination. Data related to gender oppressions and responses towards it in the novel are explored through words, phrases, and sentences.